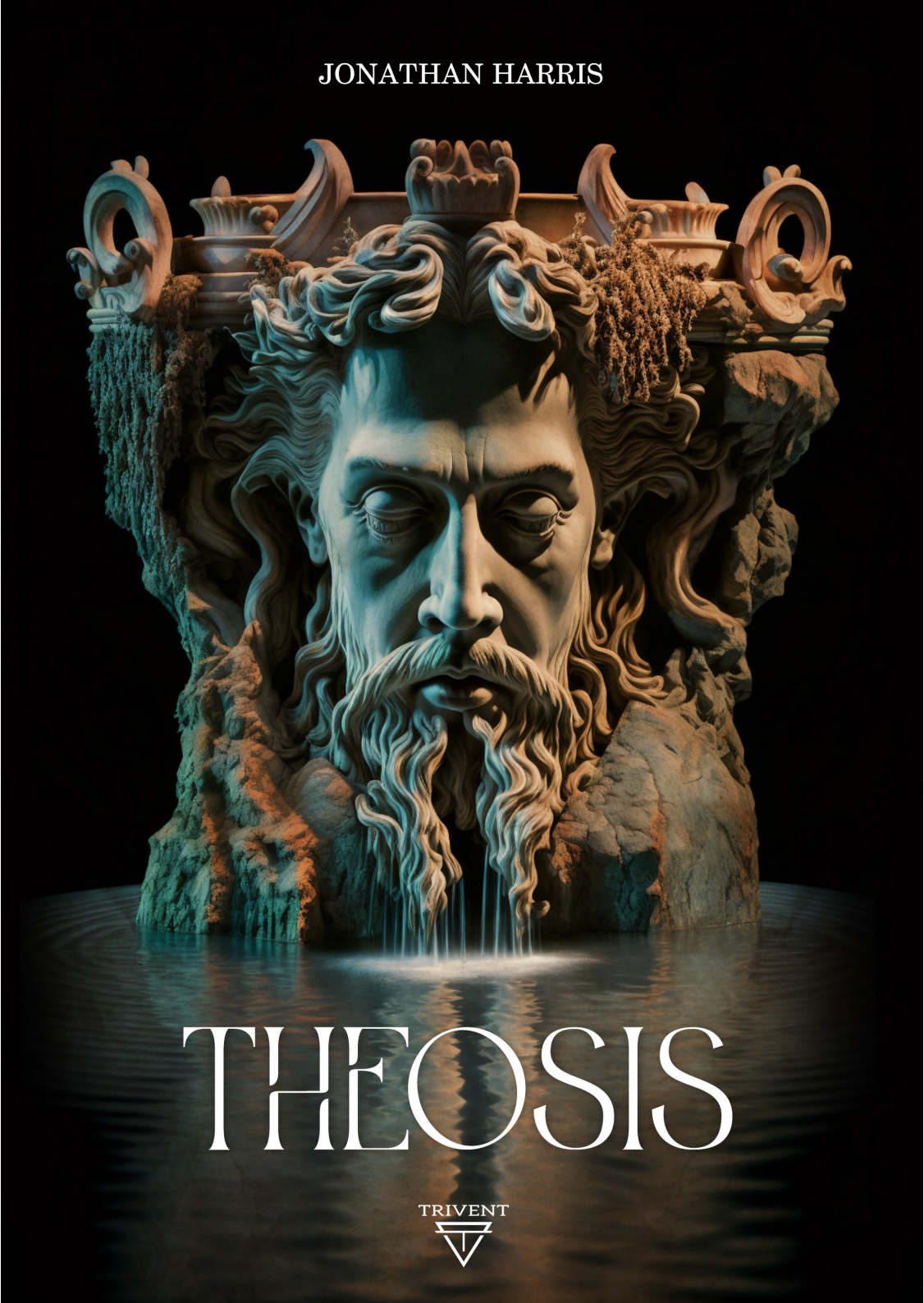
JONATHAN HARRIS



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MYTHOLOGOS

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In Memory of Justin Champion (1960-2020)

‘A change took place in his character after he acceded to the throne … he became a man of great energy.’

Account of the life of Basil II in Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, I.4, translated by E.R.A. Sewter in *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 29.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Main characters 1

Maps 3

1. The Caretaker and the Ambassador (1024) 5

2. Kainourgion (958-63) 21

3. Boukoleon (963-9) 43

4. Philopation (969) 65

5. The Caretaker and the Spy (1020) 93

6. Paideia (970-4) 103

7. Hebdomon (975) 129

8. The Caretaker and Nobody (1024) 151

9. Lausiakos (975-6) 157

10. Apostoleion (976-83) 175

11. Petrion (983-4) 205

12. Dekanneakoubita (984-5) 227

13. The Ambassador and the Emperor (1024) 251

14. Abydos (985-9) 259

15. Chrysis Cheiros (989-1024) 279

16. The Ambassador and the Spy (1024) 301

Historical Note 305

MAPS

Byzantine Empire in 1024 3
Constantinople in the time of Basil II 3
The Great Palace 4

MAIN CHARACTERS

Throughout the book:

Basil II, Byzantine emperor
Constantine, his younger brother

(1018-24):

Angelos, a spy
Aziz, al-Wuzara's Nubian servant
John the Paphlagonian, Chamberlain to Basil II
Sayyid al-Wuzara, Egyptian envoy to Constantinople
Stephen Lagoudes, cupbearer to Basil II
Yazid, attendant at the Constantinople mosque

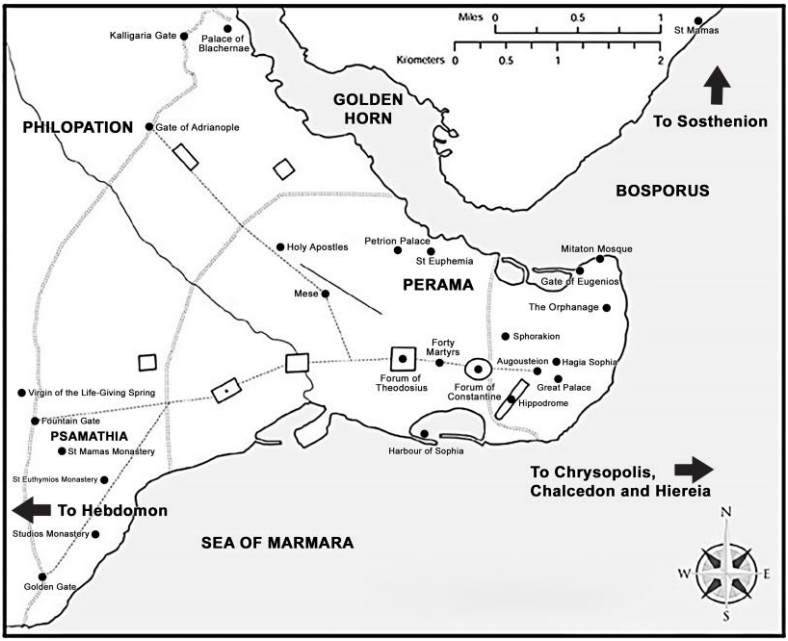
(958-989):

Anna, Basil II's sister
Anthony, a monk and later Patriarch Anthony III, Basil II's first teacher
Bardas Phokas the elder, father of Nikephoros II
Bardas Phokas the younger, nephew of Nikephoros II, later claimant to the throne
Bardas Skleros, brother-in-law of John Tzimiskes, later claimant to the throne
Basil Lekapenos, known as Nothos, chamberlain to Basil II
Demetrius Spondyles, fellow student of Basil II, later holds the office of strator

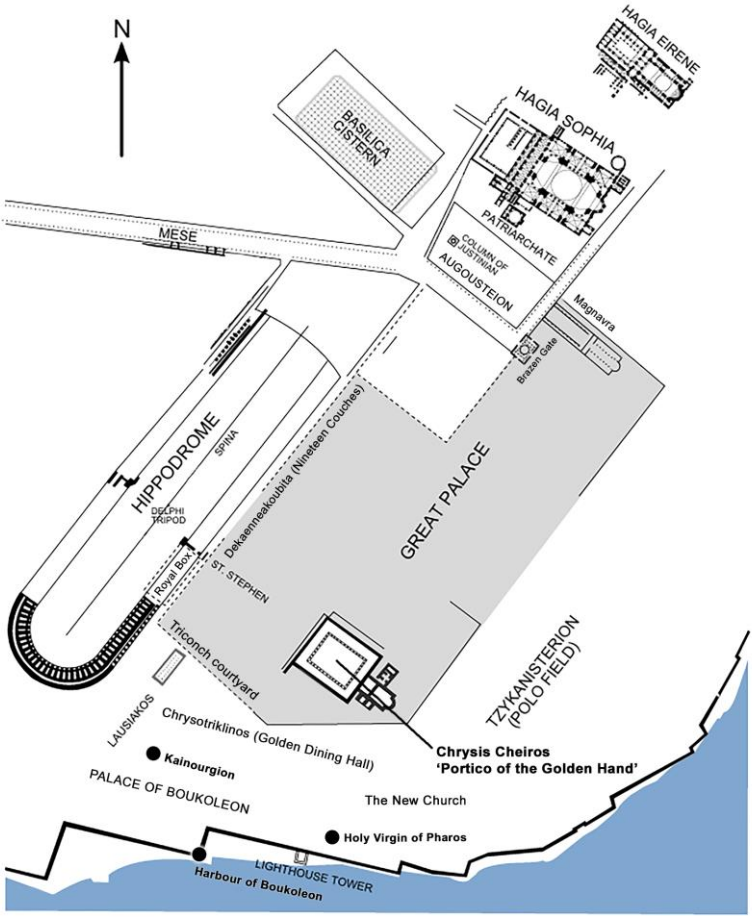
George Alypios, fellow student of Basil II, later holds the office of archivist
John Tzimiskes, soldier, later Emperor John I
Kalokyris Delphinas, fellow student of Basil II, later governor of Bari, a spy in the pay of Nothos
Leo Phokas, brother of Nikephoros II, later holds the office of count palatine
Leontios Diaphantes, Basil II's teacher, later bishop of Amaseia
Nikephoros Ouranos, friend and faithful supporter of Basil II, later holds the office of keeper
Nikephoros Phokas, soldier, later Emperor Nikephoros II
Outis, chief official of the Office of the Wine Steward
Pita, Basil II's nurse
Roupenios, an Armenian officer
Stephen Kontostephanos, known as Impy, fellow student of Basil II, later holds the office of domestic
Theodora, Basil II's aunt
Theophano, Basil II's mother



Byzantine Empire in 1024



Constantinople in the time of Basil II



The Great Palace

1

The Caretaker and the Ambassador (1024)

Every morning, summer and winter, as the sun was rising over Chrysopolis and casting a rosy light on the domes of the churches and monasteries of Constantinople, a man called Yazid would leave his narrow old house by the Sea Walls. He would walk to the Gate of Eugenios and wait there, ready to pass through once it was opened up for the day. When the custodian arrived, clinking his keys, he would greet Yazid cheerfully as he knew him well from when he had been a small boy and had used to pass through the gate with his father on the same errand. He and all the other Christians pronounced his name "Izid" and called him "the infidel" although not with any malice, for he spoke Greek just as they did and had lived in that quarter of the city all his life, just as they had. So, after some friendly words, Yazid would walk through the gate to the small mosque, the one known as the Mitaton. It stood close by, almost on the foreshore of

Constantinople's great harbour, the Golden Horn. It had a low dome and a narrow portico before the entrance but no minaret, for no call to prayer was ever made.

It was Yazid's job to take care of the mosque, first to sweep the porch and then to bring out the prayer rugs to beat them against the columns of the portico. He would brush the floor inside, carefully dust the great minbar that had been specially sent from Alexandria on a ship and make sure that everything was as it should be. At prayer times, some of the Arab merchants who lodged at the han on the other side of the Sea Wall would drift in. They too would greet Yazid cheerfully for many of them had been making the voyage to Constantinople regularly for years. And they too called him 'the infidel' because although he spoke Arabic, his accent was strange and he used childish words for grown-up things in a way that sounded very odd. Indeed when they returned to Alexandria or Tripoli they would regale their friends with stories of what Yazid had said, tears of laughter pouring down their cheeks. But when it came to prayer, Yazid knelt with them for he too was a Muslim, although his wife was Christian and his children looked as if they would prefer to be Christians too.

Not all the merchants were friendly. Some of those who came from Baghdad and Samarkand would take Yazid aside and demand to know why it was that in the Friday Khutbah the name of the caliph and Successor of the Believers was omitted and that of the Egyptian imposter mentioned instead. Yazid would shrug his shoulders and answer that he was a poor man and that God had not gifted him with wisdom, so they should ask the imam. But the imam is Egyptian, they objected, and doubtless appointed by the imposter. So Yazid would say that he was sure that God would hear the prayers in the mosque, whichever caliph was commemorated, if they were offered with a pure heart. At that the angry merchants thought he must be simple or cracked or both and they left him alone. He knew of course that the caliph in Cairo had a treaty with the emperor of

the Romans who lived in the Great Palace up the hill from the Sea Walls. The caliph agreed not to attack his border in Syria and in return, the emperor promised not to attack him and let the caliph have control of the Mitaton. So it was only fair that it was this caliph who should be mentioned on Fridays, not the one in Baghdad. That was how Yazid came to be at this mosque. His father had travelled to Constantinople with the first imam when the treaty was made in the year 391, which is 1001 in the reckoning of the Christians. Yazid had been born in Constantinople and had inherited the position of caretaker from his father, so he was paid by the caliph of Egypt. But he did not say any of that to the angry merchants.

Now it happened that, every now and then, some great man used to come to stay at the han behind the Sea Walls. He would not be a merchant but the envoy of some potentate such as the caliph of Cordova or the emir of Aleppo. Yazid seldom saw much of these men as they spent their days in negotiations in the Great Palace and might join the congregation for prayer only once or not at all during their short stay. But one day an ambassador came who wished to speak to him. It was July and the days were long and as the mosque was always kept open in daylight hours, it was twilight when Yazid passed through the gate and the custodian closed it after him. As he walked down the dark lane to where his house leaned against the wall, Yazid noticed that a tall man was standing by the door. When he came closer the man greeted him in the Islamic fashion. He was a Nubian with a turban of brilliant white and a long blue robe that showed him to be, if not a man of importance himself, then at least in the service of a one.

'I am Aziz, servant of Sayyid al-Wuzara Abu Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman al Yazuri, the envoy of the caliph and commander of the faithful Abu'l Hasan Ali az-Zahir li Azaz li Din-illah.'

Yazid must have looked confused by this long speech for Aziz quickly rephrased what he had said, telling him that his

master Lord al-Wuzara was the envoy of the caliph of Egypt, the patron of the Mitaton mosque. His master, he went on, wished to speak with the caretaker and asked whether he would he accompany him to the han. Yazid knew that at this hour his mother, his wife and children would be outside, enjoying the cool of the evening with friends in the streets that led west to Perama so he was happy to postpone his homecoming. He was a little apprehensive though and he asked Aziz why it was that such a great man should wish to speak to him. The Nubian merely repeated his polite insistence and, without revealing to Yazid the reason for the summons, led him round the corner to the han. The courtyard was crowded with merchants relaxing at the end of the day, drinking sherbet and discussing the deals that they had struck in the markets of the Augousteion. Picking their way through the crowd, Aziz and Yazid walked up the stairs to the gallery that surrounded the courtyard and Aziz showed him through double doors into a spacious room whose windows looked out onto the waters of the Golden Horn. Yazid removed his skull cap and looked round to Aziz for reassurance but the Nubian had vanished. So he bowed awkwardly to the large man who was sitting among some plump cushions on the far side of the room, although he could not see him well as only one flickering oil lamp provided any light.

'Yazid ibn Mahmud, I am al-Wuzara, envoy of the Successor of the Believers. Is the mosque that has been entrusted to your care kept in the best condition?'

'Oh yes, Lord, I attend to it daily myself.'

As his eyes got used to the half-light, Yazid made out that his questioner's substantial form was clothed in a robe of multicoloured silk, such as was permitted only to the greatest of the servants of the caliph.

'And is the name of the Successor of the Believers commemorated there every Friday?'

'Oh yes, Lord,' said Yazid twisting his skull cap nervously in his hands.

That, Yazid supposed must be the end of the matter or if the Lord al-Wuzara had any doubts he could come to the mosque himself and see. But the envoy did not bring the interview to a close. It seemed to Yazid that he had something else to say and that he was not quite sure how to say it.

'Yazid ibn Mahmud, tell me about the emperor of the Romans, the one they call Basil.'

Yazid was surprised. Why was this great man asking him, a humble caretaker, about the emperor?

'But Lord, I have never seen him, nor the other emperor called Constantine, his brother. He rides out to make war for months on end and when he returns here he lives in the Great Palace and never goes out. On Sundays he goes to the cathedral of Hagia Sophia and then he can be seen but I am a Muslim and do not enter the church.'

'That is as it should be. What then do they say about him?'

Here Yazid was on firmer ground as the streets were rife with lurid tales of the man who had sat on the throne for nearly fifty years.

'Lord, he is very old and has ruled for as long as anyone can remember. He was already emperor when my father came to Constantinople. They say that he is not like other men. He scarcely touches the wine that the Christians drink so freely. He has no wife and not even a concubine. When he is not at war, he spends his days and night reading documents and decrees. He does all the ruling. The other emperor, his brother, lives a private life and takes no part in affairs of state. It was this Basil who conquered Bulgaria and Armenia. He wages war like a demon and is terrible in his anger. They say that after he had won a battle against the Bulgars a few years ago, he commanded that all men he had captured should have their eyes burned out. But at the same time he decreed that every hundredth prisoner should only lose one eye and those one-eyed men were then made to lead their comrades home. Another time, when he…'

'Yes, yes, yes,' interrupted al-Wuzara, 'I could learn all that in the souk and most of it is old wives' tales. What do they say about what the emperor knows?'

Now Yazid was all at sea. What was it that this man wanted from him? As he honestly had no idea, he simply answered 'Lord?.' The lamp flickered in a sudden puff of wind from the sea, making the shadows dance on the face of the visitor from Cairo.

'Yazid ibn Mahmud, can we trust you? Are you mindful that it was the father of the current Successor of the Believers who sent your father to Constantinople to care for our mosque as if it were a bright pearl on a dunghill of impiety? Does not the Successor of the Believers sustain you and your family to this day?'

Yazid acknowledged that that was indeed so and that he always remembered the Successor of the Believers in his prayers and asked God to send blessings upon him and upon his house. But for some reason he felt he should add as an afterthought that he lived among these Romans, that his wife was one of them and that would not wish them harm.

'No one is asking that of you. After all, the Successor of the Believers is not the enemy of the Christian emperor for he has had a treaty with him these twenty years. It is something else that we ask: they tell me that you speak Greek as the Romans do.'

'Yes Lord, I was born in this city and that is the language I find easiest to speak. But it is the Greek of the streets, not that of the palace which the great folk use when they write their documents and decrees.'

'It will suffice,' said al-Wuzara, 'Let me now tell you what I need you to do. I arrived in this city some ten days ago to carry out negotiations on behalf of the Successor of the Believers. We were received in the first instance, as is customary, by the vizier whom they call chamberlain I think.' His tongue stumbled over the long and unfamiliar Greek word: *parakoimomenos*. 'He is named John the Paphlagonian. We discussed our business through interpreters: he had his and I mine, a man called Jacob.

You do not need to know what the discussions were about as they would not interest you and you would not understand them anyway.'

At this point he broke off and glanced sharply at Yazid. The caretaker's mouth was slightly open and he was still twisting the skull cap. Reassured, al-Wuzara went on:

'As the discussions proceeded I became aware that the vizier was better informed than he should be. He had intelligence that he should not, indeed could not, have possessed, and yet possess it he did. It seemed to me that there was only one possible source of such details: my own interpreter, Jacob. He is, after all, a Christian, one of the Copts who reside in Cairo. He may have some residual sympathy for his co-religionists in this land and be passing information to them. How could I know what he was saying to the chamberlain? As I know no Greek, I would be none the wiser. Perhaps I am wrong and the man has been faithful to his task. Even so, I would be reassured and would count it as a personal favour if you were to come with us to the next meeting tomorrow. You will not need to speak, merely to listen and report to me if any untranslated discourse takes place between the Copt and the Romans.'

'But Lord, will they not think it strange that a humble mosque attendant is there at a meeting with the chamberlain, the greatest man in the land after the emperor?'

'I have thought of that, Yazid ibn Mahmud. You will go in disguise. I will be taking gifts for the emperor and six bearers will carry them. You will take the place of one of the bearers, wearing his turban and robe and no one will notice you. But be warned: it is not the vizier that we meet tomorrow, though doubtless he will be there. It is the emperor himself.'

As Yazid emerged from the room, Aziz was standing silently on the gallery overlooking the courtyard. He stared at Yazid without expression but slowly moved his head as if to impress on him that all would be well. And for some reason Yazid did feel reassured by that as he made the short walk home. Even so, when

he got to the threshold of his house, he picked up a smooth pebble from a small pile that he kept underneath the wooden steps to the door. He walked back to the gate of St Eugenios and felt along the wall until he found a small recess. He placed the pebble in it and then went home to his wife.

* * *

So it was that Yazid rather unexpectedly found himself the next morning in a small procession that was winding its way along the narrow streets that lead uphill from the Sea Walls. In his unfamiliar turban and robe, he walked behind another man bearing on his shoulder a chest of cedar wood filled with gifts for the emperor of the Romans. Two other men were on the far side for it was a heavy burden. Behind him walked two other bearers holding smaller boxes in their arms and behind them the foreman. Ahead, he could see the litter in which al-Wuzara was being carried, closed off by curtains to shield him from the curiosity of passers-by, with Aziz and the Coptic interpreter Jacob walking alongside. An honour guard from the Great Palace escorted them, clearing a path for them as they went. It was certainly something of an adventure for Yazid but he fretted about the neglect of his duties at the mosque, even though the imam had been warned that he would not be there that morning.

The narrow streets gave way to broad boulevards and the ground levelled out, for the procession had passed into the district of Sphorakion where the great men of the city had their mansions. Yazid had never been here before. On the rare occasions that he went with his wife to the markets of the Augousteion, they took a different way that skirted the wall of the Great Palace. No doubt the route had been carefully chosen by the Romans to show the Egyptians the wealthiest and most impressive parts of the city. The mansions stretched all the way to the wide thoroughfare known as the Mese and the procession turned left along it to reach the Augousteion. The great square had always been a

source of wonder to Yazid, especially the tall column that stood at its centre, topped by a statue of an emperor sitting on a horse. He always wondered how the Romans had got it up there. The great domed cathedral of Hagia Sophia loomed over the square and at the far end was their destination, the Brazen Gate, the entrance archway to the Great Palace. Yazid had seen it many times before with its stone emperors and empresses from long ago crowded into niches on its façade and the small church planted precariously on top of it, but he had never been inside.

Since they were expected, the gates had been flung wide and on both sides a detachment of guards armed with axes and shields saluted them as they passed. Inside the gate, there was a spacious hall with a vaulted roof where a larger than life emperor and empress made of little cubes of marble peered down from either side. Yazid though was careful to not to look around him and kept his eyes fixed on the turban of the man in front. The procession made its way up a wide marble staircase, the bearers behind hoisting the litter up above their heads to keep it level. Then unexpectedly they all emerged once more into the summer sunshine. For the truth is that the Great Palace is not just one building but a sprawling jumble of them, set among terraces and gardens on a slope overlooking the Bosporus. The Egyptians were guided round to the left and led towards the closest of the large buildings which Yazid heard one of the guards call the Magnavra. The route led through parterres and avenues of cypress trees and into a wide courtyard. The entrance to the Magnavra was at the far side behind a colonnade and on the steps in front of it a reception committee was waiting, lined up behind a heavy man who was holding a staff and wore a tall silk hat. At an order from the foreman, Yazid and his companion laid down the cedar chest while al-Wuzara emerged from his litter.

The reception committee stepped forward and Yazid tried not to gawp at their gaudy robes. People dressed like that never found their way down to the corner near the gate of St Eugenios

so the sight was novel to him. All the Egyptians though were quite used to the splendours of the Fatimid palace in Cairo and stared ahead of them impassively. By now the man with the staff, whom Yazid took to be the chamberlain, was in conversation with al-Wuzara, leaving gaps every now and then for Jacob to render his words into Arabic. He was telling the ambassador about the protocol for an audience with the emperor and Yazid listened to what he said.

'You will process down the centre of the hall and as you proceed I will walk in front of you and two of my colleagues will escort you, holding your arms: that is our custom. Your men will follow you. As you process, you will observe that the throne of Solomon in the apse at the far end will be empty: that is quite in order. At my signal you will stop and make the obeisance, even though the throne is empty and the crowd present will make their acclamations. When the acclamations cease, you may arise and you will find that their majesties the holy emperors will be seated before you. You may then make your presentation during and after which their majesties will remain seated. The Emperor Basil will ask you some questions about your mission and then at my signal,' he banged his staff on the ground three times to demonstrate, 'the audience will be over. You will withdraw backwards, not turning your backs on the emperors.'

Al-Wuzara said that this was all as he had expected and Yazid thought so too. He had heard many things about the splendours of imperial receptions: about the golden lions on either side of the throne that were said to move and roar as if by magic and the golden tree from whose branches mechanical birds sang sweetly as if they were alive. So as he helped to pick up the cedar casket once more, he was full of anticipation about the spectacle he was about to see. The procession mounted the steps and moved between the columns. As it entered the cool entrance hall of the Magnavra, a heavy curtain was drawn aside and Yazid could see ahead into the throne room beyond. It was

a cavernous hall, lit by small windows that ran all around the base of the dome that surmounted it. Bronze lamps hung from chains on the ceiling to supplement the natural light. There was a great throng of people there but they all moved aside to make a passageway for the chamberlain and the Egyptians who followed behind. Al-Wuzara looked very ungainly with his bulky frame gripped firmly by the rather short men whom Yazid took to be two of the eunuchs who were everywhere in the emperor's court. Ahead the throne was indeed empty as the chamberlain had said it would be. It was much wider than Yazid had expected, with room for two men to sit. He wondered whether that was because there were two emperors but someone later told him it was because the emperor was believed to share the throne with the prophet Jesus. There were two lions made of gold that supported the arm rests as he had heard and the golden tree was there too, at the very back of the hall behind the dais on which the throne stood. But none of the birds moved or made any sound and the lions lay passive and silent.

Then the chamberlain turned and rapped his staff once on the marble pavement. Everyone in the room went down on their knees and bowed their foreheads to the floor. Yazid and his fellow bearers hastily put down their burden and followed suit. Then the crowd stood up and began shouting in words that al-Wuzara did not understand but Yazid did:

'Hail, Basil and Constantine, great emperors of the Romans, most powerful sovereigns, servants of God, may you reign for a hundred years!'

When they had fallen silent, the chamberlain's staff was rapped on the marble again. The Egyptians slowly got to their feet and, looking up they beheld: a god!

Standing before them on the raised dais was a man well above average height with a commanding presence. He had a thick mane grey hair and a matching beard that reached down to his chest. Although he must have been over sixty, one could see that he was powerfully built and that it was muscle, not fat,

that filled out his imperial robe. On his head was a crown, from which strings of precious stones dangled and glinted. He was swathed from head to foot in a gorgeous vestment made of silk and spun gold that sparkled in the beams of sunlight that entered the chamber from the windows above. He made Yazid think of that Sultan Muhammad ibn Thailun who ruled over Egypt with justice and mercy in the tales his father used to tell him. So this was the conqueror of the Bulgars!

Al-Wuzara, on the other hand, was not so much overawed as somewhat put out and discomfited by the breach of the very protocol that the chamberlain had so tediously lectured him about. Why was the emperor standing and not seated as they had been told? Seasoned envoy that he was though, he put the thought aside and began his speech:

'Great Emperor of the Romans, I come in peace and friendship from the caliph and commander of the faithful Ali az-Zahir, with these tokens of our esteem and good intent.'

He turned to indicate the gifts and Yazid and the others hastened to unfasten the clasps of the cedar casket. But that was as far as they got for the godlike emperor did not react, not in words anyway. Instead he made a most curious sound, like the bark of a dog, which al-Wuzara strongly suspected to be laughter at his expense. The emperor then turned his back and walked away to a smaller throne at the back of the dais. Throwing himself into it with an audible puff, he began reaching inside the folds of his robe as if searching for something. After some fumbling and more puffing, his hand emerged holding a small knife and he then stretched languidly over to a bowl beside the throne from which he selected a ripe peach. This he began carefully to peel, bestowing no further attention on anything or anyone. Everyone in the Egyptian party stood rooted to the spot, with not the faintest idea of what to do next. Al-Wuzara helplessly looked towards the chamberlain who was by now standing impassively at the left of the dais. His eyes met those of the ambassador and flickered

urgently to his left, to the great golden throne in front of which the god had been standing a moment before.

The light in the hall was uneven, for although the summer sunshine was streaming in through the high windows, the beams fell on some spots but left others in deep shadow. The light of the lamps was likewise uncertain and flickering. No beam fell directly on the throne so it was only now that Yazid realised that someone was sitting on it and that he was watching the ambassador intently. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he made out a diminutive figure whose feet scarcely reached the cushion at the throne's foot. His long beard grew in two forks from his cheeks, while his chin was bare, and he was gently turning the grey hairs in his stubby fingers. Unlike the god, he was very plainly dressed with only a purple cloak and one jewelled brooch on his right shoulder to mark his rank. He wore no crown. This then was the famous Emperor Basil, and the god the brother. How very strange that their appearances should be the opposite of the power they were said to wield!

Like the brother, this emperor seemed to pay little heed to the chamberlain's protocol for he too got up and stood looking down at the ambassador from the dais, with his hands on his hips. Hardly a regal posture, thought Yazid. He noticed too that the emperor was rather plump and wondered whether he might not have been better advised to stay sitting, for when he was on his feet it became apparent just how short he was. Most powerful men would have preferred to hide that. These musings were soon dispersed for the emperor had begun to speak and his voice was full of anger.

'It was our deepest wish and bounden duty to welcome you magnificently to our hall but the impiety of your master does not permit it.'

Al-Wuzara was dumbstruck by the tone, even if he did not know the meaning of the words, and he staggered backwards, causing the interpreter to sidestep neatly even as he translated.

The envoy stammered helplessly in an effort to reply but could not get any words to come out. The emperor went on:

'Yesterday, elements of your master's army crossed the border in Syria and marched towards our city of Antioch. Because we have long had a treaty with the caliph of Egypt we had in place no preparations for such a sudden and unprovoked attack. Only just in time were the gates of our castle at Harenc closed or the forces of the caliph might have occupied it. Yet you come here speaking of friendship and asking for the renewal of the treaty? We had thought that the followers of Muhammad respected truth and honour, yet you have shown yourselves to be no better than barbarians. You will leave my hall and return to your lodging. You will remain there under guard, until we have heard from our governor in Antioch that the troops have withdrawn. Such is my will. Let it be done.'

With that he turned and disappeared into some hidden passage behind the throne. The god had vanished too though he had long since been forgotten. The chamberlain's staff crashed to the floor three times and he cried 'The audience is over!' before he too slipped away behind the throne. The crowd in the hall did not disappear though. Every man and woman began bellowing 'Treachery, treachery!,' jabbing their fingers at the Egyptians and closing in on them like angry hornets. Al-Wuzara nearly fell over the cedar casket of gifts as he turned and rushed for the door. Yazid and the others dived for their burden to make it fast for the journey back but then suddenly with one accord decided to leave it where it was and started to run after al-Wuzara. One of the bearers whispered urgently to Yazid:

'Do we have to run backwards?'

By now they were having to force their way through clutching hands that pulled at their clothes and tried to slap their heads. When they had passed through the entrance hall and emerged into the daylight, there was worse to come. Yazid could see al-Wuzara who had reached his litter but the

perimeter of the courtyard was lined with soldiers who had drawn their swords. They were wearing metal helmets with visors over their eyes which made them look even more menacing. Yazid now wished that he had never come with the ambassador and feared that he would never see his wife, his children or indeed the mosque or the house by the Sea Walls ever again. But the soldiers did not move. They merely started to tap their swords on their shields, at first softly and then harder and harder until they were making a sound like thunder. This was very threatening but the Egyptians could see that the soldiers had left an opening at the far side through which they could pass. So very deliberately al-Wuzara began to walk towards that point, trying to look dignified as he led the retreat. His servants followed behind him, carrying the litter underarm rather than on their shoulders. Yazid and the bearers followed, then the interpreter, the foreman and Aziz. All the time, the soldiers kept up their rhythm, crash, crash, crash, as their swords hit their shields. The procession passed slowly through the gap and out onto the path towards the Brazen Gate. As they passed between the rows of Cypress trees, al-Wuzara's pace started to pick up. The men behind were much younger and fitter and could easily have overtaken him but they loyally trotted along behind, matching their steps to his. The crashing died away behind them and al-Wuzara hitched up his robe to help him go faster. They hurried down the marble stair and through the Brazen Gate to find themselves once more in the Augousteion, the guard waiting to escort them back to the han and to make prisoners of them. Only now was the litter set down and the curtains drawn aside for al-Wuzara to enter. As he did so, Yazid distinctly heard him hiss to Aziz: 'How could he possibly have heard so soon, after just one day? We are betrayed.'